



Hip Dysplasia



Hip Dysplasia: An Overview

Hip dysplasia occurs when there is abnormal development in the hip joint. Cartilage in the joint degenerates and releases a large amount of enzymes into the joint. These enzymes further destroy and prevent the formation of new cartilage. With cartilage that can no longer help cushion and support the joint, movement can become increasingly difficult and painful. Hip dysplasia is mainly found in large dogs, but can affect all dogs no matter the size or breed. It also has been known to lead to a degenerative joint disease known as osteoarthritis which can add more pain and inflammation than is already present.

Causes of Hip Dysplasia

Although genetics play an important role in hip dysplasia there are some factors which can affect the incidence of hip dysplasia including nutrition, excessive growth, and exercise.

Preventing Hip Dysplasia

In breeds that are prone to developing hip dysplasia, there may not be a way to completely prevent the disease. However, there are steps you can take to delay the onset or slow down the progression of the disease. These include keeping your dog at a healthy weight, providing proper nutrition and exercise, and provide your dog with a soft, warm, comfortable place for sleeping.

Symptoms of Hip Dysplasia

Symptoms of hip dysplasia can vary, but include reduced range of motion, stiffness in the joints, a grating sound when the joint is moved, a "bunny hopping" like gait, and lameness. The lameness in the animal can be mild, showing very little to no pain, moderate, or severe, to the point of being unable to walk. The degree to which an animal is affected varies from case to case. In some cases a hip x-ray will show extreme dysplasia the animal may show no signs of pain, whereas another x-ray will show only mild dysplasia and the animal may show severe pain when moving.

Diagnosing Hip Dysplasia

Hip dysplasia is diagnosed by the use of radiographs. An x-ray is taken of the animal's hips and a trained professional will read the x-ray to determine what condition the hips are in. In addition to the radiographs, palpation of the joint can help determine joint laxity.

Palpation is also helpful in the diagnosis of young dogs where x-rays fail to show any structural deformities.

Treating Hip Dysplasia

Treatment for hip dysplasia can be surgical or medical. When the case requires surgery, operations such as joint replacement are done to reduce pain and inflammation. Mild cases usually do not require surgery and can be treated in many ways. Some of these include weight reduction, exercise restrictions, physical therapy, and anti-inflammatory drugs. Life style changes may be necessary to make it easier for these dogs to be involved in everyday life.

Care for Dogs with Hip Dysplasia

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The AKC Canine Health Foundation and Hip Dysplasia

CHF has funded six studies on hip dysplasia. This projects have looked at the effects of spay and neuter on bone development, searching for the causative genes, and looking for treatments.

This article is provided by the AKC Canine Health Foundation whose mission is to advance the health of all dogs and their owners by funding sound, scientific research and supporting the dissemination of health information to prevent, treat, and cure canine disease. For more information or to support their work visit www.akcchf.org.

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